

1 John 5:19 Commentary

PREVIOUS

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FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN
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Another Overview Chart - [1 John](#) - [Charles Swindoll](#)

BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP		BEHAVIOR OF FELLOWSHIP	
Conditions of Fellowship	Cautions of Fellowship	Fellowship Characteristics	Fellowship Consequences
Meaning of Fellowship 1 Jn 1:1-2:27		Manifestations of Fellowship 1 Jn 2:28-5:21	
Abiding in God's Light		Abiding in God's Love	
Written in Ephesus			
circa 90 AD			

From Talk Thru the Bible

1 John 5:19 We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies *in*the power of the evil one:

Greek - oidamen (1PRAI) hoti ek tou theou esmen (1PPAI) kai o kosmos holos en to ponero keitai (3SPMI):

Amplified - We know [positively] that we are of God, and the whole world [around us] is under the power of the evil one.

NLT We know that we are children of God and that the world around us is under the control of the evil one.

NIV We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

Wuest - We know with an absolute knowledge that out of God we are, and the whole world in the Pernicious One is lying.

- **we know:** 1Jn 5:10,13,20 3:14,24 4:4-6 Ro 8:16 2Co 1:12 5:1 2Ti 1:12
- **and the:** 1Jn 4:4,5 Joh 15:18,19 Ro 1:28-32 3:9-18 Ga 1:4 Tit 3:3 Jas 4:4
- **evil one:** 1Jn 5:18 Joh 12:31 14:30 16:11 2Co 4:4 Eph 2:2 Rev 12:9 13:7,8 Rev 20:3,7,8
- [1 John 5 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

WHO'S IN CONTROL OF THE WORLD?

This verse "declares a decisive spiritual contrast." ([Hiebert](#))

As **Henry Alford** says "While **we are from God**, implying a birth and a proceeding forth, and a change of state, the **kosmos** (the world), all the rest of mankind, remains in the hand of the evil one"

David Smith titles this verse "Our Security in God's Embrace."

Steven Cole sees this verse essentially as a restatement of 1John 2:15-note ("*Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*") commenting that "throughout the letter, John has drawn a sharp line between **believers** and the **world** (1Jn 3:1, 13; 1Jn 4:4, 5; 1Jn 5:4, 5). **He does not allow for a middle category, of true believers who keep one foot in the world.** Either you are "**of God**" and separate from this evil world, or you are **of the world** and you lie in the arms of the evil one. John described the world (1Jn 2:16-note) by the three phrases, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life," and said that such things "are not from the Father." Believers must not live to gratify the flesh or to pursue the outward, material things that consume the world's fancy. Life is short and hangs by a thread. To take pride in this life or in this evil world is to trust in what will soon perish. Only that which is eternal is worth pursuing." ([1 John 5:18-21 Knowing This, Guard Yourself](#))

We know ([1492](#))(*eido/oida*) speaks of absolute, beyond a shadow of a doubt knowledge. The **perfect tense** identifies this knowledge as "an abiding inner assurance concerning their spiritual origin." ([Hiebert](#))

We are of God (Literally - "we know that out of God we are.") This phrase is a description of the believer's parentage **from** God and possession **by** God. We owe to Him and His lovingkindness and saving power the fact that we have the privilege to be called His children. **Are we living like we are His children? Does His kindness toward us motivate us to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age?** (Titus 2:11-14-note) One writer says **we are of God** implies "not only origin but a sense of belonging." "To be gripped with this certainty "is to be charged with a principle of righteousness that can dissolve every bond of iniquity, that breaks the power of worldly fear and pleasure and will make us, living or dying, more than conquerors." ([Hiebert](#) quoting Findlay)

NET Note on of (ek) God - The preposition **ek** here indicates both **source** and **possession**: Christians are "*from*" God in the sense that they are begotten by Him, and they belong to Him. ([NET Note](#)) (**Comment:** This reminds one of Paul's words to the church at Corinth - "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that **you are not your own**? **For (term of explanation** - What is Paul explaining?) you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." 1Cor 6:19-20-note)

Vincent on we are of God - John expresses the relation of believers to God by the following phrases:**To be born or begotten of God**, (1Jn 5:1; 2:29; 4:7): denoting the initial communication of the new life.**To be of God**, (John 8:47; 1John 3:10; 4:6): denoting the essential connection in virtue of the new life. **Child of God**, (John 1:12; 1John 3:1, 10): denoting the relation established by the new life.

Hiebert - True believers know that they belong to God and not to this world. This declared certainty challenges the readers to demonstrate that reality in their daily lives. ([The Epistles of John- An Expositional Commentary](#))

Cole comments that the phrase **of God** "means that Christ "gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age" (Gal 1:4-note). Or, as Paul also wrote (Col. 1:13-14-note), "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." We now belong to and serve a new Master. He gave us new life, so that in every sense, we are "of God." So our lives should be God-centered and God-focused. We should be taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2Cor 10:5-note). John says that we **know** this. But in light of many recent surveys, which show that there is no discernible difference in morals or values between those claiming to be *born again* and the population at large, it is not out of line to ask, **Do you know this? Is there a fundamental difference between your priorities and goals and those of your non-Christian neighbors? Are you living for God and His glory and kingdom, or**

do you just attend church services a little more often than the rest of the population? It is axiomatic: "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1Jn 5:19). ([1 John 5:18-21 Knowing This, Guard Yourself](#)) (Bolding added)

And (kai) in this context sets out a clear contrast between **of God** versus **of the evil one**. And so this terrible truth is also what **we know!** Did you know this? How should this impact our interactions with this fallen world system? (cp Col 3:2, Jn 17:11 Recall that in the temptation of Jesus, the devil made an unusual offer to our Lord. "He led Him (Jesus) up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil (**diabolos**) said to Him, " will give You all this **domain (exousia** ~ the right and the might) and its glory; for it **has been handed over (paradidomi** = to give over to the power of another and in the **perfect tense** = handed over at a point in time [when Adam sinned] and speaks of his continuing authority, but only until the true Ruler returns! Rev 19:11-16-[note](#)) to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." (Lk 4:5-7) Notice that Jesus did not debate the devil's proclamation that the world was his domain in this present evil age!

In Jesus' prayer to His Father, He repeatedly alluded to the believer's relationship to the world and asked for our protection from the world system - "And I am no more in the world; and [yet] they themselves are **in the world**, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, **keep** them in Thy name, [the name] which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We [are.] 12"While I was with them, I was **keeping** them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me; and **I guarded** them, and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. 13"But now I come to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy made full in themselves. 14"I have given them Thy word; and the world has hated them, because **they are not of the world**, even as I am not of the world. 15"**I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world**, but to **keep them from the evil [one.]** 16"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17"Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth. 18"As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19"And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. 20"I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, [art] in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. 22"And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; 23I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me. 24"Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world." (Jn 17:11-25)

The whole world - There is stress on the adjective **whole** which is accentuated by rendering it "the world, the whole of it." (See note below by **Hiebert** on "**whole**")

Vine observes that there is "a connection with 1Jn 5:18. While believers are beyond the power of the evil one to separate them from Christ, the rest of mankind, who constitute "**the world**," are in his power (see John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11); they are controlled by him as "the prince of this world," (Eph 2:2-[note](#)) and their condition is therefore that of spiritual death (Eph 2:1-[note](#)) (contrast 1Jn 5:20-[note](#)). The separation which exists between Christ and the evil one should find its counterpart in the separation of the believer from the world... There is no contradiction between this verse and what is said in 1Jn 2:2-[note](#) ("**whole world**"); for the propitiation made by Christ for the world was provisional and potential; it becomes actual only through faith.

Whole (3650)(**holos**) means complete in extent, amount, time or degree. **Holos** is used in the phrase "**whole world**" in 1Jn 2:2. **Hiebert** points out that "The position of the adjective "**whole**" (holos) implies that the indicated relationship applies to all humans who belong to the world in its estrangement from God." ([The Epistles of John- An Expositional Commentary](#))

World ([2889](#))(**kosmos** related to the verb **kosmeo** = to order or adorn) means essentially something that is well-arranged, that which has order or something arranged harmoniously. In the present context **kosmos** defines the **world** not as a neutral influence but as an "evil force", the inveterate, incorrigible, intractable, intransigent enemy of God and of His children. **Kosmos** is the whole mass of men alienated from God and hostile to Jesus (E.g., Just mention the name "Jesus" in a positive sense in a secular setting! You can "feel" the hackles rising up on the back of their necks!)

Compare **kosmos** with the term [Earth Dwellers](#).

Marvin Vincent writes that **kosmos** is "The sum-total of human life in the ordered world, considered apart from, alienated from, and hostile to God, and of the earthly things which seduce from God (Jn 7:7;15:18; 17:9, 14; 1Co 1:20, 21; 2Co 7:10; Jas 4:4)." ([Word Studies in the New Testament](#))

David Smith says **kosmos** is "the sum of all the forces antagonistic to the spiritual life." ([Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

Trench summarizes the definition of the anti-God world system as "All that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitutes a most real and effective power, being the moral, or immoral atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again inevitably to exhale."

Kosmos in 1John - 1 John 2:2, 15-17; 1Jn 3:1, 13, 17; 1Jn 4:1, 3-5, 9, 14, 17; 1Jn 5:4-5, 19.

Lies (2749)(**keimai**) means literally to be in a recumbent position, to lie down, to be laid down. The root meaning refers to lying down or reclining and came to be used of an official appointment and sometimes of destiny. In the military keimai was used of a special assignment, such as guard duty or defense of a strategic position - the soldier was placed (set) on duty.

Hiebert says John paints a vivid word picture with this verb keimai which means "to lie, recline, (and) pictures the world as characteristically nonresistant to and passively dependent upon the power that grips the lost masses of humanity; that power John identifies here as *tō ponerō*, which the KJV renders "in wickedness."... John did not say that the world is "of" (**ek**, "out of") the evil one (**Ed**: like he did when he said we "**are of God**" = "*ek tou Theou*"), for the Devil is not the source of their being; he did not create them. He holds control over those in the world as a usurper, one "who controls it with tyrannical authority, organizing and orchestrating its life and activities to express his own rebellion and hatred against God." Thus Jesus portrays the Devil as "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31 NASB; 14:30; 16:11). ([The Epistles of John- An Expository Commentary](#))

Steven Cole adds that the picture of the verb **keimai** "is not of frantic captives, desperately trying to escape this depraved tyrant. Rather, they lie quietly in his evil clutches, oblivious to their tragic plight. The god of this world has blinded their minds (2Cor. 4:4-note). They can wear "Life is Good" T-shirts, oblivious that they are wandering perilously close to the edge of the abyss. They don't realize that "in due time their foot will slip" (Deut. 32:35 [**Ed**: This is the text for Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon [Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God](#)]) and they will face God in judgment. Rather, they are sleeping peacefully in the arms of the evil one who will destroy them!" ([1 John 5:18-21 Knowing This, Guard Yourself](#))

Beloved there are only two kingdoms - all the world can be divided into either children of the devil or children of God. As **Hiebert** says "It is a matter of lordship. For John there is no middle ground between these two spiritual masters and the realms which they head. As a free moral agent, man is free to choose his master, but he is not free to be without a master." (cp Mt 6:24).

Lies is in the **present tense** which describes Satan's grip on this world as continual... at least during this present evil age (Gal 1:4).

Vincent on **lies** - The word is stronger than *esti*, 'is,' indicating the passive, unprogressive state in the sphere of Satan's influence.

David Smith - On the child of God the Evil One does not so much as lay his hand, the world lies in his arms. On the other hand, the child of God lies in God's arms. Cf. Deut. 23:27. ([Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

The power of (NIV = "control of", HCSB = "under the sway of") - This phrase is added by the translators for this fact is what the context assumes - the evil one exerts his evil power over evil men, all the unsaved world! **The only key that is able to release those enslaved to the evil one is the Gospel! Are you proclaiming the Gospel with your life and your lips?**

Evil (wicked) (4190)(**poneros** from **pono** = work or toil, Robertson says the idea is that labor is an annoyance, bad, evil) means evil including evil, malignant character, pernicious, that which is morally or socially worthless, wicked, base, bad, degenerate. **Poneros** denotes determined, aggressive, and fervent evil that actively opposes what is good. **Poneros** is not just bad in character (like **kakos**), but bad in effect (injurious)! **Poneros** describes evil in active opposition to good. It means not only evil in its nature but viciously evil in its influence and actively harmful. See also **devil** (**diabolos**).

We meet this nefarious player (**poneros**) five times in this short epistle - 1Jn 2:13-note, 1Jn 2:14-note, 1Jn 3:12-note, 1Jn 5:18-note, 1Jn 5:19-note.

Most agree that **poneros** in this context is used to describe **Satan** (ho poneros = "Evil one"), the god of this age, who is corrupting man and dragging him to destruction. This denotes someone who is not content in being corrupt themselves. They seek to corrupt others and draw them into the same destruction!

- See related discussion regarding the Devil's Temptation of Jesus in Luke 4:6-note

John MacArthur has a helpful comment on 1 John 5:19...

Despite the existence of countless political, cultural, and social entities in the world, there are in reality only two realms. It is the comforting privilege of believers, in addition to having eternal life, answered prayer, and victory over sin, to know they belong to God. Though they exist in this world, they are not part of it (John 15:19; 17:14); they are children of God (John 1:12-13), "aliens and strangers" (1 Peter 2:11; cf. 1 Pe 1:1, 17; 1 Chron. 29:15; Ps. 119:19; Heb. 11:13), whose true citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20).

On the other hand, the whole world—its politics, economics, education, entertainment, and, above all, its religion—lies in the power of the evil one. The evil world system is hostile to God and believers (John 15:18—

19), as John noted earlier in this epistle. It takes its cue from its ruler, Satan (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; cf. Eph. 2:2; 6:12), the archenemy of God and His people. Because the world is completely under Satan's influence, believers must avoid being contaminated by it (1 Jn 2:15–17; cf. James 1:27).

There is no middle ground, no third option. Everyone is part of God's kingdom, or of Satan's. In the words of Jesus, "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters" (Luke 11:23). Or as James scathingly declares, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4). (MacArthur NT Commentary)